

ID-10T Error: Internal System Error

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/13848303) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/13848303>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	The Avengers (Marvel) - All Media Types , Iron Man (Movies) , Thor (Movies) , The Avengers (Marvel Movies)
Relationship:	Loki/Tony Stark
Character:	Loki (Marvel) , Tony Stark , James "Rhodey" Rhodes , Frigga (Marvel) , Thor (Marvel) , Odin (Marvel)
Additional Tags:	Angst , Angst with a Happy Ending , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Suicide Attempt , Drama , Arguing , Mistakes , Mental Health Issues , Star Trek References
Series:	Part 2 of ID-10T Error
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-02 Completed: 2018-03-08 Chapters: 7/7 Words: 12129

ID-10T Error: Internal System Error

by [babyblueglasses](#)

Summary

The version of ID-10T Error where everything goes wrong.

Notes

This is the angsty version/alternate ending of sorts of ID-10T Error. Please heed the tags.

The story starts around [chapter 26](#). The original of course isn't going to go this route, and has plenty of fluff if you need some after reading this version!

Please note that this is not written as a how to guide to deal with things. Characters make mistakes, don't understand, and misinterpret. They won't always know the right things to say or act their best. They're human and trying and not at all perfect.

The story is already written and should be fully posted within a week. It's slightly over 10k. Enjoy!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Naturally, the one time Thor had to be gone on a business trip to Copenhagen alone, Loki's father slipped into a coma.

His father had a history of seizures, but this hospitalization had a weight to it that gave Loki an uneasy sense of foreboding. His mother appointed him temporary CEO. Just because his father was incapacitated didn't mean that the business suddenly stopped running.

The first night, Loki worked until eleven, then went to the hospital to see his father. His mother was sitting beside his bed, asleep. Careful not to wake her, Loki quietly entered the room. He stared at his father, his stomach twisting into knots as he took in the pallid sheen of his skin. He seemed gone already. It was a terrible feeling.

Loki glanced back over at his mother. He wished to wake her, but he knew her. She'd probably been sitting in that chair all day.

There were no personal belongings in the room but her purse. Loki walked back out into the fluorescent lit hall and followed the signs to a vending machine. He bought what he knew his mother would like, then returned to the room, setting them on the table beside her purse. He reached into his suit jacket and withdrew one of his business cards.

On the back he wrote a brief note to his mother, telling her he'd been there and that he'd drop by tomorrow before setting the card on top of a bag of pretzels.

Loki was barely aware of the drive home. He crawled into his bed, grabbing his phone to set his morning alarm for earlier than usual. It was then that he saw half a dozen missed texts from Tony.

The usual thrill of seeing something under Tony's name was replaced by an overwhelming sense of guilt. This was the first time he'd ever missed their nightly call. Even worse, he'd completely forgotten it in the events of the day.

Loki wrote back an apology, along with an explanation of what was going on. He hoped that Tony forgave him in the morning. Loki set his phone down on his nightstand and pulled the blankets up over his shoulders, staring into the dark.

He'd always wanted the company.

He'd never wanted to receive it like this.

Loki drew the blankets in closer against his chest. He adamantly wished Thor were back so he'd have someone to help with things. Thor hadn't been able to get a flight. It was going to be a couple of days before he was able to return.

Loki rubbed his hands against his face. His family needed him. He was the only one that could keep things running, and he was more than capable of it. He'd just have to push through for a while.

Rolling onto his side, Loki tried to bury the worries that popped up into his mind like weeds. He was exhausted. His body was spent. His mind just needed to shut off for a bit.

The light of Loki's phone blinded him as it flashed. He reached for it, half afraid that it was his mother with bad news. Instead, there was a text from Tony.

Are you okay? Do you need anything? I can come over.

Loki smiled, his cheeks heavy with the motion, as his gaze softened.

The idea was thrilling, but Loki knew he'd be getting up early. Besides, Tony needed to rest and he was so prone to worry anyway. He'd only had that new job for a short time, and Loki didn't want them to think less of Tony if he was late or tired. *I should be fine with some sleep*, Loki texted back.

Goodnight. I love you. Text me when you can tomorrow, okay? Loki stared at the message, wondering what he'd done to deserve someone so precious.

The next day, Loki signed off as CEO for the very first time on a contract they'd been trying to win for the past year. He led conference calls and set the managers on new tasks and sorted through his correspondence in addition to Thor's and his father's. When Sif went home for the day, Loki still had a half dozen things that couldn't be pushed off to the next day.

He sat on a couch in the middle of the office, eyes darting across a letter that had been sent to his father. He didn't know the answers to it off the top of his head. Standing, Loki dropped the letter on the table and went towards his father's office.

He flipped the lights on. Loki's eyes scanned over the room, across the dark wood shelves and patterned upholstery, to a set of filing cabinets. Loki had been coming to this office since he was a small boy, when his father only took him in on the weekends to get him out of his mother's hair. Little had changed in the room since those days.

The filing cabinets were locked, but Loki knew their key was kept in a box inside his father's desk. He retrieved it. Hundreds of manilla folders drew towards him as Loki lugged the heavy drawer forward. There had to be thousands of papers. Loki rolled his eyes. Of course the one fucking file he wanted to check would be buried in this mess somewhere.

Loki thumbed through, first trying the company folder that the letter had come from. Nothing. He was digging through to his next guess when he glimpsed his name.

Loki paused. Normally he'd have ignored it because there were hundreds of company papers with his name on them. But this one had an elaborate border printed along the edge and was a heavy weight paper. Loki wedged it out of the file, mildly curious. Perhaps his father had kept one of his certificates of achievement. It'd be nice to think his father had held on to all of them. A nostalgic smile crept onto Loki's face.

His eyes darted along the page, only for the smile to abruptly slip from his lips. The letters started to spin together, blurring the name of the orphanage and his birth parents' names, a ringing sound filling his ears as his skin turned cold and clammy.

This work cannot be taken and posted onto other sites. It has been locked to ao3 users only due to such.

Chapter 2

Tony had let Loki sleep the night before because he knew Loki had a tendency to run himself into the ground. But Loki had never failed to return his texts before, not for an entire day. He'd never failed to return his calls either.

Tony stared at his phone.

No messages. Just like that morning. Just like at lunch. Just like at all of Loki's usual smoke breaks and every ten minutes after that and dinner and the last three times Tony had called since he'd gotten off work.

He knew it was Loki's big dream to be CEO. Maybe he was fine?

But his dad was in the hospital.

Fuck, Tony just wanted to hear his voice. He just wanted to check that Loki was okay. Was that so much to ask?

He paced his apartment, strung between being pissed at the guy and worried out of his god damn mind. Rhodey had even told him he needed to take a breather when he was at work. Tony hit call.

It rang. In spite of himself, Tony allowed himself to hope with each ring.

"This is Loki Odinson, Assistant Director of Asgard Corporation. Please leave your name and contact information. I will return your call at my earliest convenience."

"Hey," Tony told his voicemail. "I know you can see my missed calls," Tony said, but as he spoke, the anger abruptly faded. He knew in his heart that something was not right. This wasn't like Loki. "Call me, okay? And uh, tell me what hospital your dad's staying at, alright?" Tony hung up. He didn't know what else to do.

He sat down on his couch for all of two seconds before he was up pacing again. Fuck it. He couldn't sit around like this. Maybe Loki was at the hospital, but if he wasn't there, it was a pretty damn good bet that he was still at work.

Tony threw on his jacket, digging his car keys out of the pocket.

When Tony got there, the building was lit up, but everyone had gone home. The doors were locked and he didn't have his keycard anymore. Tony couldn't even get into the employee parking lot. He'd had to park across the street. Tony leaned against the glass of the front doors, hoping beyond hope that somebody else had stayed late and was going to let him in. There was no such luck.

Well, the fire escape door to his office in the basement had usually been unlocked, hadn't it? Loki left it that way on his breaks. Tony went around the building, down the alleyway that Loki usually smoked in. He pried the heavy metal door open. Maybe he'd say something to Loki about security later.

It felt strange to be back in his old office, but Tony didn't linger. It just made the urge to find Loki that much stronger. Now that he was in the building though, he felt calmer.

By the time the elevator was halfway to the top, Tony started having second thoughts. He'd kind of...panicked, hadn't he? Just because Loki didn't answer his phone didn't mean it was the end of the world. In fact, he was pretty sure that Loki had pointed that out to him before. And Loki had way too many fucking responsibilities in this place. Loki didn't have a lot of spare time. Tony knew that.

Feeling a little sheepish, but not ashamed enough to turn around, Tony waited for the elevator to reach the top floor. When the doors dinged open, he felt a spiteful sense of glee not to see Sif at her desk.

Loki's door was open. Tony could see that Loki wasn't at his desk, but he started walking towards Loki's office. Tony poked his head in the door, smiling hesitantly as he looked towards the shelves where he expected Loki to be. No one was there.

Tony stepped back. He looked around behind him. The floor was lit up. And...Loki's phone was on his desk, hooked up to the charger. Tony walked over. He had to know if Loki had seen his texts.

His most recent voicemail was there. Tony thought about deleting it, then went to the text messages. Loki hadn't checked anything after twelve o'clock. There was half of a reply written to him. *I'm going to the hospital after work, then I'll* Tony set the phone down. "Lo?" He called.

Tony walked past Sif's desk and the glass partition. It felt like he was crossing a line, but that was probably because the top floor had always been off limits to him. There were papers scattered across a coffee table. A cold mug of tea was beside them and a half eaten bag of peanut butter candy. "Loki?"

The conference room was dark, but the lights were on in another office. He strode towards it. "Hello?" He called, sticking his head inside.

There was nothing but a filing cabinet, halfway opened. Several files were stacked on the desk. Pages were scattered and dozens were set in sections on the floor. Loki had to be up here. Tony set his hands on his hips, frowning. Maybe he was in the bathroom? This floor had a private one, right?

As Tony started to search for it, he walked past a copier that had the platen glass cover left open. That wasn't exactly interesting, but the ajar front door of it caught Tony's eye. Somebody must've given up on a paper jam.

It was usually such a quick, easy fix. Tony stopped. Maybe it was a compulsive habit, but he wanted to take care of it.

"I'm fixing your stuff and I don't even work here anymore," Tony muttered. "Alright, let's see what's going on with you," he told the copier. Tony eased the front door open. A paper was ripped to shreds in one of the gears.

"Somebody got impatient," Tony said. "Here we go." He eased the shredded pieces out, dropping them in the trashcan without paying any attention to what was on them. Tony reset the gears and closed the platen glass cover. "There we go, all better."

The copier lit up. It printed out a copy of its previous job. Tony grabbed it, intending to set it on top for someone to notice, when he spotted Loki's name.

...at which Thor Odinson will take over as Chief Executive Officer in place of Odin Borson. Loki

Odinson will be named as Chief Operating Officer... Tony scanned the document, flipping it over. There was Odin's signature, along with a witness, signed over ten years ago.

Tony had to find Loki. Tony had to find Loki right now.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This is an especially good chapter to be mindful of the tags if you wish.

“Loki!” Tony urgently paced the floor, but the bathroom was empty and Loki was no where to be found. Tony raked his fingernails through his hair. Where would Loki be? Think. Think!

A smoke break. Loki always went out for a smoke break when he was pissed. And if he hadn’t been in the alley by IT, then...there was a roof here, right? Tony spun around. The escape exit door had a picture of stairs.

Cold wind smacked Tony in the face as he lugged the door open. There was a simple set of stairs leading upwards. He lunged up them, ignoring the crushing sense of how high up he was.

At first, Tony saw nothing but the city lights in the darkness. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust, to see the figure standing off in the distance. Tony recognized him instantly.

Tony’s heart slammed against his chest. Every alarm in his head was blaring. Loki was a couple of feet from the edge, too close to be normal. If Tony scared him, it wouldn’t be hard to startle and fall, would it? Dizzy, Tony walked towards him, extending out his hands.

“It’s me,” Tony said, a desperate plea in his voice. “Loki, it’s me—”

Loki turned around, the hair whipping his dark hair back and forth, obscuring his red rimmed eyes for a moment. Loki stared at him like he didn’t recognize him.

If Tony’d had any doubts about Loki’s intention, they were gone now.

“Loki,” Tony said, head spinning. Tony was close enough to reach him, and he grabbed Loki’s suit jacket, walking Loki forward with him and away from the edge. Loki stumbled, bumping into Tony and then jolting like he’d been struck, immediately taking a step back from him. The jacket seams stretched in Tony’s hold, snapping a couple of hundred dollar threads.

Loki stared at Tony like he couldn’t comprehend him, and it was long enough for Tony to see how utterly devastated Loki was.

“Come downstairs,” Tony said. “Loki, you have to come downstairs.”

Loki’s hands were like ice as he grabbed Tony’s wrists. Tony wouldn’t let go. Loki stared at the spot Tony was grasping.

“Come downstairs with me,” Tony said.

Loki’s eyebrows pinched for a second, and then he took a step forward, as far from Tony as he could manage, but it was still in the direction of the stairs. Tony grabbed one of his hands.

Loki’s skin blanched beneath his fingers. Tony took a step towards the stairs and the tension in Loki snapped. Loki followed after him like a helium balloon on a string. Tony didn’t let go as they

descended. He didn't let go as they walked past the couches and coffee table where the papers were scattered. Tony was shaking.

When they started to get into the elevator, Loki stumbled back. Tony wouldn't let go. "I have to get my phone," Loki said.

It was the first time Tony'd heard his voice since everything had happened. It was so broken and hollow.

Tony thought about letting go, but his hand didn't do it.

"My mother might call," Loki said, the wild in his eyes belonging to someone that Tony didn't recognize. "She's at the hospital."

Tony took a step forward and Loki seized the opportunity, leading the way into his office and ripping the phone from its charger. He then unplugged the charger with some difficulty, sticking it in his suit pocket with his only free hand. Tony tugged at him, directing them back to the elevator.

Loki leaned back against the wall when they got in, Tony punching the buttons harder than he ever had in his life.

It was starting to hurt, but he couldn't release Loki's hand.

Loki rubbed his nose, clutching his cell phone. The wind had shredded his hair into a frizzy mess. It was obvious that he'd been crying, but it was the emptiness in his expression that made Tony's stomach twinge.

They said nothing as they went to Tony's car. They stopped at the passenger side door. Tony's fingers ached as he pried them apart, releasing Loki's hand. Tony wavered beside Loki as he got in. Loki put on his seatbelt without a word. Only then did Tony shut the door, locking it with his key fob as he walked around the hood of the car.

They didn't say anything as Tony drove. Tony kept glancing in Loki's direction, but every time Loki was the same. He stared out the window, unseeing, his phone still clenched in his hand.

For once, Tony didn't want to talk. He just wanted to get Loki safe in bed. It was the only thing in his mind.

And he did, although he felt eerie as they stayed silent walking up to his apartment, and even more when Loki stood beside his apartment door, unmoving. Tony had to set his hand on Loki's back and guide him to the bedroom, throwing clothes he knew fit Loki onto the bed. Loki was silent as he dressed and pulled back the covers, lying on his side away from Tony's spot.

Everything was surreal. Tony undressed for bed because he knew that pattern. Then he crawled in.

Tony wrapped his arms around Loki, folding his legs in with Loki's, unable to think of anything but making certain that Loki was there and safe. Tony trembled as the adrenaline started to ebb. Loki had let all of his weight fall back into Tony, boneless and heavy.

They'd been lying like that for a long time when Loki reached over and grabbed Tony's hand, setting it against his chest. Tony heard Loki's breathing ease into sleep, but Tony didn't realize when he drifted off and he woke constantly, checking that Loki was still safe in his arms.

Tony woke up to Loki's phone alarm.

He rolled over, trying to find Loki in the dark. Just as his hand started to frantically pat the mattress, light flooded the room. Loki was using his phone's flashlight to navigate. "Where—"

"Bathroom," Loki answered. A moment later, Tony heard the bathroom door open. His head was spinning, groggy and disoriented.

Tony tried to catch up with his thoughts. He turned on the lamp by his bed. Shit. Right. Loki.

Tony held his breath. He strained to hear every sound in the bathroom. It was his only assurance that Loki was indeed in there, and okay. Tony rubbed his eyes as he heard the sink turn on. A few moments later, Tony was relieved when he heard the bathroom door open. Loki walked back into the room.

He avoided eye contact, picking up his suit. "Loki," Tony said. "You're not leaving, are you?"

"I work today," Loki reminded him, the grip on his clothes tightening.

Tony crawled forward on the bed. "Take the day off." Loki only stared down at the suit in his hands. "You can stay in bed with me." Loki shook his head, still avoiding Tony's gaze. "Loki, I really don't think—"

"—Tony," Loki cut him off firmly. "I cannot lay in bed all day. There is too much that I have to do." He took a step back and dressed with an efficiency and speed that came off as cold.

Tony watched with blood shot eyes, his hair messed to one side as he sat there in his boxers. He didn't understand how Loki could do something as normal as button up his shirt. "Are we just going to pretend like nothing happened last night?" He quietly asked.

Loki's fingers faltered as he raced to do his tie.

"Loki," Tony said, imploring the man to look at him. When he didn't, Tony found himself getting pissed even though he could plainly see how exhausted and distraught Loki was. "Loki," he tried again with no luck. "What were you doing up on the roof?" Tony accused.

"Getting some fresh air," Loki said, the same way he did before slamming the door to go out on a smoke break.

"Bullshit," Tony said. It hurt too fucking bad to be lied to when Tony knew exactly what had happened. "Bull. Shit." Loki's head snapped towards him, his eyes narrowing into a seething glare. "I found that paper in the copier when I was looking for you."

The words hung heavily in the air between them.

Tony had never had Loki stare at him with contempt before. The sensation was horrific. "Does it surprise you to discover that I'm adopted or is it just me?" Loki asked, caustic and bitter.

"Wait. What?" Tony asked.

Loki looked him up and down, as if Tony had just lied to him.

"I found the paper about your brother getting the company," Tony said.

Loki looked away, more pissed than before, if that was possible.

“My father’s favoritism finally makes sense,” Loki said. He tugged at the knot of his tie. “I can’t stay for breakfast.”

Tony scrambled off the bed as Loki started for the door. “No,” Tony said. “I’m not, I can’t, not after last night. Fuck that place for a day, Loki. It’s too much pressure—”

“—I need to go,” Loki said firmly. Tony hovered beside him, wanting to touch him but certain that his touch was unwelcome. “Thank you for last night.” The harsh formality of it was the worst thing Loki could’ve said.

Tony planted his hands on his hips to stop himself from wildly waving them around in frustration. “You can’t go into work,” Tony said, voicing rising. “You’re not well—”

“—Let me go, Tony,” Loki argued, voice raising right up with Tony’s.

“No way! I thought I was going to lose you last night.” Tony’s voice broke. He hadn’t realized how awful it had been until the words were coming out of his mouth. “I thought—how could you do that?” His face burned, tears threatening. “How could you go up there and not think about us? About me? How could you be willing to throw everything away like that?”

Loki had been tightly coiled, and Tony had provoked him to the point of striking. He should’ve seen it coming, but he didn’t.

“I didn’t do that *to you*,” Loki snapped. In all the times Tony had seen Loki angry, it’d never been directed at him and it hurt. “I wasn’t thinking about *you* when I went up there.” That hurt. It fucking hurt.

“How could you not remember?” Tony asked. “I love you, doesn’t that mean anything—”

“—For the last time, it wasn’t about *you*!” Loki screamed. “Forgive me if I needed a fucking moment after discovering my parents adopted me and lied about it! You’re right, it’s perfectly fine that my family lied to me and that I’ll never inherit the company I worked so god damn fucking hard to improve, that my life is a lie, how *dare* I think anything else—”

“—So that’s an okay reason for you to go up there?” Tony yelled right back. Nothing was worth Loki losing his life over. Nothing.

Whatever it was, Tony could help him.

Loki blinked, disoriented almost. His entire face was flushed red, and between his anger and charged emotion, Tony missed noticing the tears at the corners of his eyes.

Loki breathed in slowly, breath shaking. “You could’ve just told me,” Tony said, trying to make him see. He hadn’t been alone. “You could’ve returned my fucking calls instead of—”

Loki stepped out of the bedroom. Tony stood there for a moment, staring at the space he’d been in, a new wave of panic setting in. Tony was fuming and terrified and on the verge of tears again. By the time he’d gotten his legs to stumble after Loki, Loki was beside the front door, putting his shoes on.

“Loki, wait.” Loki grabbed the door handle. “Loki—”

Loki slammed the door shut behind him, the front door to the building sounding a split second later. Tony rushed to the window. Loki didn’t have his car. He didn’t have a car! Loki was striding down the city street, drawing his phone from his pocket.

Tony broke down into gut wrenching sobs, crumbling into the window seat.

Chapter 4

“Are you sick?”

Tony’s spaced out gaze wobbled as it found Rhodey. “Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Yeah, you’re sick, or yeah, you’re fine?”

“I’m fine,” Tony said.

Rhodey stared at him, perfectly silent, before returning to work at his keyboard.

Tony drifted back out a moment later. He hadn’t had the guts to text or call Loki since that morning. He kept checking Asgard’s website though, as if something that happened to Loki would be posted there instantly. It didn’t even say anything about Odin’s coma.

“Let’s go grab something to eat,” Rhodey said. Tony glanced at the clock behind him. He hadn’t realized it had been an hour already.

“Sure,” Tony said.

They walked a couple of blocks over to one of their usual spots. Tony didn’t say anything the whole time, but he didn’t realize that either. Rhodey waited until they’d ordered their food to bring it up. “So Tones,” he said. “Do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

Tony turned to him with dull eyes. He was so unbearably grateful that Rhodey was asking, but at the same time, he knew it was heavy and he didn’t want to drop that on Rhodey. He wasn’t used to sharing those things. “Don’t worry about it,” he said, flashing a glib smile that’d always worked for his dad.

Rhodey breathed in slowly, determined and irritated. “No offense Tony, but you really look like you could use a friend. And I’m pretty damn sure that’s what we are, so if you don’t start telling me what it is, I’m going to start guessing.”

“I don’t want to just unload it all on you,” Tony said.

Rhodey rubbed his chin, thinking. “Tell you what. The next time I’m having a bad day, you ask, alright?” Tony stopped hunching his shoulders. “You listened to me when my last date went bad.”

“Uh—” Tony blinked back the tears that were so eager to appear, forcing them down. So much for pretending he was fine. “Last night I found Loki up on the roof at Asgard.”

Tony didn’t know what he’d expected, but he was relieved that Rhodey didn’t freak out. Instead Rhodey leaned forward, concerned and attentive. “I think,” Tony said, “he was going to jump, and I grabbed his hand and made him come home with me.” He blinked away a couple of tears, steeling his voice as he rubbed his cheek. Tony set one hand over his fist, squeezing it. “This morning we got into a huge fight.”

Rhodey said nothing for a moment, waiting. Then he spoke. “What was the fight about?”

Tony closed his eyes, fighting off the tears. A warm hand set on his shoulder. Tony drew in a raspy breath. When he blinked his eyes open, Rhodey was still watching him, listening. “He found out they weren’t going to give him the company and his parents adopted him and he just went up there.

He didn't call, and I'd been calling him all day. He didn't even think about us."

The sympathy and compassion in his friend's expression validated how dire the situation was. It deserved attention. Tony hadn't needed to pretend otherwise.

"That's really tough," Rhodey said.

Tony nodded. He wiped his face.

"Is that why you got into a fight, because he didn't call you?" Rhodey asked.

"Sort of. He—he was really mad," Tony said.

"Why?"

Tony had to think about it. He'd been avoiding the memory of their fight all day. "Um." Tony reached for his drink. The cold liquid rushed down his throat, soothing him. "He said it wasn't about me," Tony said, setting his glass down.

"What wasn't about you?"

"Why he was up there, I guess," Tony said. He shook his head slightly, as if that'd knock away the thought and make it clear. "I don't know." Tony grasped his hands together. "I didn't want him to go to work today and we just—exploded." Tony flexed his fingers over his fist. "I was so mad at him for not calling and thinking about doing it," Tony said, his voice rich with ire. "I was terrified he was going to do it when I found him. Last night, I—I thought if I let go of him, he'd do it." Tony scratched his beard. "And this morning he wouldn't talk and I—got pissed."

"That's a lot of stress for one person to take," Rhodey commented. Tony barely nodded before he noticed the water arriving with their food. Tony wasn't hungry, but he started to pick at his fries. "I know how much you love Loki," Rhodey said, voice warm. "It must have been terrifying to think you were going to lose him." Tony couldn't do anything but nod. "I also know how much Loki loves you."

Tony glanced up at him. Rhodey didn't look away but held it, meaning what he'd said. Tony needed that reassurance.

"From what I can tell, Loki's got a lot to handle right now. His father's in the hospital and he's CEO and then the guy finds out that he's adopted and he's always going to be second. That's a lot for anyone to handle." Rhodey frowned, expression still rife with sympathy. "I don't think he meant to hurt you, Tony. I think he was in a lot of pain."

Tony had to sit with that thought for a moment. He hadn't realized he'd needed to hear the first part.

He hadn't realized how much the first part had clouded his thinking about the second part about Loki's pain. Shame rushed in.

"This isn't the sort of thing that either of you should be dealing with on your own, Tones. It's honestly not something I'm qualified to handle either, but I do know that we should get you two with somebody that can."

Tony got what Rhodey was saying. "I—I know. I'll talk to him about it."

Rhodey frowned. Tony could tell that he was considering his words carefully, rejecting the first

few that had come to mind. “Tony, I understand why you’re upset with him and I think it’s a normal response, but if you’re angry at him when you talk to him about it, I don’t think it’ll go well. He needs you to be on his side right now.”

Tony pressed his palm against his forehead. “I know I shouldn’t be mad at him, but I—” He didn’t know how to explain it.

“I’m going to tell you what my dad’s always told me,” Rhodey said. “You can’t control how you feel, but you can control your mindset and your actions.” Rhodey sort of shrugged. “It means don’t beat yourself up over how you feel. You didn’t pick it.” Rhodey set his hand on his drink, then let go. “Just like I don’t think Loki wanted to be up on that roof. Not really.”

Tony let the words sink in. It was overwhelming to process and he was struggling.

“But you’ve still got to deal with it,” Rhodey said.

Tony blinked. He’d been in panic mode since last night.

But it never mattered how frayed his mind was, he could always work on solutions. He needed to talk to Loki.

“I think I’m going to try and catch him at the hospital when he gets off work,” Tony said. “I’ve got to figure out where his dad’s at first.”

“Do you want to take the day off?” Rhodey asked.

“Actually,” Tony forced a smile. “I’d rather work. I know Loki. He’s a workaholic and who knows, maybe at this point in the day he’s got a dozen legal teams working to his advantage to figure out how to stay CEO.” That thought hadn’t occurred to Tony all day, but now that he’d said it, he felt silly for not thinking of it sooner. “And it helps me to have something to focus on and work.”

Rhodey nodded. As he picked up his burger Tony said, “Thank you for talking to me, Rhodey. You have no idea how much it means to me.”

“I told you, next time I’m having a bad day, you owe me.” Rhodey smiled at him. “I’m going to call you tonight to see how things are going, alright?”

“Okay.” Tony smiled at Rhodey, overcome with appreciation.

The conversation drifted towards more neutral topics, and Tony was finally able to engage with his friend without spacing out every other sentence. The uncomfortable concern on Rhodey’s face never left. Tony didn’t stop worrying, but he realized as he ate that he hadn’t eaten at all that day.

Chapter 5

It wasn't too hard to figure out where Loki's father was staying, but it did involve duping Sif into believing that he was a client that wanted to send get well flowers. Tony got turned around twice in the hospital, but eventually he found the private room. Nervous, he slowly pushed open the door, shielded by a bouquet of thick yellow flowers.

Tony was taken back by the sight of Odin, a heart monitor beeping away beside him. He looked like his usual self, minus all the plastic tubing. Tony'd only ever seen him from a distance. It was unsettling to see someone so powerful suddenly vulnerable. Slowly, Tony noticed the woman sitting in a chair beside him. She'd already taken notice of him.

She had curly golden hair that was pulled back from her face, and a sharp intelligence in her eyes that reminded Tony of Loki. "Uh," Tony said. "Is—Loki here?" She had to be Loki's mom. This had to be the worst meet the parents in the history of parents.

She shook her head slowly, standing up. "Are you—you're Tony," she said, more certain. She reached towards him, and despite Tony's knee jerk reaction to shrink away, he didn't. She set her hand on Tony's arm, eyes brighter. "It's nice to meet you. I'm Frigga."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Tony," Tony parroted. "I brought these," Tony said, extending the bouquet towards her.

"They're lovely." She set the flowers on a small bedside table. Mrs. Odinson turned back to him, studying him with a precision that made Tony anxious and uncertain. Her brow wavered for a moment. "Would you like to sit down?"

Tony didn't know what the right answer was. Was he imposing, or was he being rude by not saying yes? Normally he'd know, but today his brain wasn't working. "I don't mean to bother you. I just thought I'd catch Loki before he went home."

"You're not bothering me at all," she said. "Loki hasn't been by yet today. Sit down." That time what she wanted was pretty clear. Tony took a seat. She moved her purse off of the table between their chairs, leaving a half eaten bag of pretzels on the table. "My son seems to be quite taken with you. I'm glad I finally got the opportunity to meet you." She smiled, amused. "He's so private. I thought it would be ages before he brought you around to introduce you."

"He talked about me, huh?" Tony smiled awkwardly.

She tilted her head to the side slightly, a half smile on her lips. "Only to me. I suspected he'd met someone. I could see how much happier he'd become." Tony could only nod, staring uncomfortably at the hospital sheets.

"He will be alright," Frigga said. "The doctors are quite hopeful. He should be waking up any day now." Tony realized that she was trying to comfort him.

He set his jaw. "Loki will be CEO until then," Tony said.

"Yes," she said. Tony couldn't look at her to see what she thought of his statement.

"That company means everything to him," Tony said. His voice shook with the weight of his words. He felt unbearably angry again. How could Loki's family be so blind? "Loki—it's going to kill him if he doesn't get to be CEO."

“Excuse me?” She was obviously alarmed, but Tony still flinched when he saw her expression.

“Mrs. Odinson—” Tony’s voice trembled. He didn’t mean to say anything, but it was bubbling up out of him and her shock was being replaced by concern, and damn, the way she looked at him, it was sympathetic in a way that his own mother had never managed. “Last night, I found Loki up on the roof. He found his adoption papers and that the company’s going to Thor.” Fuck, that wasn’t his to tell, was it? Why the hell had he said it? But she needed to know, didn’t she? “He—I-loves your f-family so damn much, and he works his ass off way more than anybody else—”

She set her hand on his shoulder. It was bewildering how such a small gesture could be so comforting. The well inside him surged up. Tony gritted out his words, torn between agony and anger. “And you guys are killing him. I thought he was going to do it last night, he was going to jump—” Tony hiccuped, hot tears rolling down his cheeks.

Tony hadn’t planned on telling her. He didn’t *want* to tell her. But he was lost and angry and it just sort of happened.

The next thing Tony knew, he was pulled into a tight hug and realizing that Loki’s mom smelled like sunflowers and cinnamon. Tony’s breath rattled out with a wet, raspy sound. A hand set on his back, drawing in circular motions.

Tony heard the door coming open and blinked through bleary tears. He tensed when he recognized Thor, who was staring at the scene in astonishment, one hand still on the door handle. Tony started pulling away, but a set of hands caught his. Thor looked at him with something like sympathy for a brief moment before focusing on his mother. “Mom, what’s going on?” Thor asked, louder than he probably meant to in his concern.

Mrs. Odinson squeezed Tony’s hands so he’d look back at her. He realized her eyes were rimmed red, a wet spot on her cheek. “I will make sure he’s okay.”

Thor came in, standing beside them. Tony blinked, helpless as more tears fell down his cheeks. “Mom?” Thor asked.

“Our family needs to have a discussion that’s long over due.” She released Tony’s hands, folding her own in her lap as her tired features set with determination.

Tony pulled his shirt sleeve up over his wrist, drying his face with it.

“Is your brother at the office?” Frigga asked her son.

“Yes, he’s still finishing up reports.”

“I’m going to head over there. Stay with your father.” When she started to stand up, Tony did too, trying to avoid being left alone with Thor. He didn’t want to have to explain. Frigga wrapped her arm around Tony’s shoulders.

“Mom?” Thor asked, obviously aware that something was horribly wrong.

“I’m going to walk Tony out to his car,” she said. Tony stomach flipped. “We’ll talk when I get back, alright love?” Thor nodded, soothed by the answer in a way that Tony almost envied. As Thor settled down into the seat Tony’d been in moments before, Frigga walked Tony out into the hall. She dug down into her purse.

“Here,” she said, handing Tony a tissue.

“I didn’t mean to—”

“—Nonsense,” she said. They stepped into the elevator together. A few patients and staff were in there already, so they fell silent. Tony avoided his reflection in the metal doors, cleaning off his face. It was embarrassing and nerve wracking, but he had to acknowledge that he felt relieved too. He’d doubted that Loki would listen to him, but he was sure that Loki’s mother would be able to help him. That was sort of all that mattered right then.

It was only when they got to the parking lot that they were alone again. Mrs. Odinson stopped at the curb, turning to Tony. He paused, even though his car was in sight and part of him wanted nothing but to slump into the driver’s seat and lock the doors.

“Thank you for telling me.” She reached for his hand, cradling it in hers as if she was afraid that Tony wouldn’t believe her. “And thank you for being there for my son.”

“I just want him to be okay.”

She squeezed his hand. “Will you be alright tonight?”

“Yeah.” Tony nodded, looking away. “I’ve got a friend that’ll be checking up on me.”

“Good.” She let go when Tony didn’t answer. “Thank you again, Tony.”

Part of Tony wanted to accept the comfort she was offering and believe that everything’d be perfect and fine. The other part of him felt bitter and hateful simply because Tony also blamed Loki’s family for what’d happened. Mostly he was dazed and still shocked that he’d told. He was afraid to think what Loki would say about that. But Loki wasn’t going to talk to him and Loki wasn’t safe either. He needed somebody. And he’d never spoken ill of his mom like he had of his dad.

“I’m going to head home,” Tony said. She nodded and Tony took it as his cue to leave, striding out into the parking lot and slamming his car door shut behind him.

When he got home he called Rhodey. He told him what’d happened, and then they spent the better part of an hour talking about other stuff. Tony couldn’t have been more thankful.

Chapter 6

The next time Tony texted Loki, he got a text back from his mother saying that Loki was unable to take his texts. She promised that she would keep him posted. Tony spent all of Friday working too hard at work, trying not to think. He didn't hear anything from Loki that evening either.

On Saturday morning, Tony rolled out of bed and decided that there was nothing he was going to do but watch some episodes of Star Trek and eat his favorite food. No thinking, no worrying, no nothing.

And it felt good. It also meant that he found himself midmorning, staring out his kitchen window with a cup of coffee in hand, ready to talk to Loki. He missed him, and now that he'd had sleep and some rest, Tony's heart ached for him too.

He realized that he could've been kinder with Loki. He regretted their fight, even though he felt it'd been unavoidable. He also blamed himself for not being better. Rhodey was right. Loki needed him on his side right now.

Tony slipped his phone out of his pocket. *Is Loki available?*

Tony took a sip of his coffee. The text would probably go unanswered all day.

His phone chimed. Surprised, Tony looked to find that he'd already been texted back. *It's me.*

Hey. Can I come see you today? He added a hopeful emoji at the end, praying that Loki wasn't still too mad at him to talk.

I'm going to be at the hospital visiting my father if you want to come. :)

The smiley face was a good sign.

Tony set his mug down.

He could do this.

Frigga and Thor were sitting in the two closest chairs beside the bed when Tony padded inside. They glanced up, but Tony missed their expressions as he caught sight of Loki sitting at the end of the row with them. He was wearing faded jeans and an oversized sweater, but he looked alert. Well. He had his fingers folded together, his chin set on them as he leaned his elbows on his knees. He was staring at his father, oblivious to Tony's entrance.

"Mom, I think we'd better go down and get breakfast before they stop serving it," Thor said. "It's almost lunch."

Loki glanced over, then set eyes on Tony, slightly surprised. He leaned off his fingers, sitting up.

"I think you're right," she said, getting up with Thor. She smiled at Tony as they walked past him. Tony returned an embarrassed smile.

Tony sat down in the chair beside Loki. It squeaked under him. He bit his lip.

He'd been practicing what to say in the car, but now none of it seemed right.

Loki appeared equally unsure. He opened his mouth only to close it, gaze dropping down.

Tony's heart soared at being so close to Loki again though, and he was relieved to see him.

Loki started wringing his hands. The motion caught Tony's eye, then drew it to the dark purple and blue streak on the soft spot between Loki's thumb and the back of his hand. Tony's mind raced to make sense of it. Loki rotated his hand as he fidgeted, and then Tony saw the fingerprint like bruises on his palm and understood. "Loki," Tony exclaimed. "Oh, god, I'm so sorry."

Loki's hands faltered. He held the bruised hand up slightly, staring at it as he spoke. "I—was quite furious at you for it yesterday," Loki said. Tony felt like the worst person in the world. "But now I understand how—" Loki licked his lips. "I am not as angry with you for it now," he said, leaning closer to Tony when he spoke. "I didn't feel it when it happened."

"Still. God. I'm sorry, Loki. I didn't mean to do that."

"I know."

Loki tugged at his sweater sleeve, drawing it over the mark. Tony's stomach sank. He was going to have trouble forgiving himself.

"You told my mother," Loki stated, the words strained and tight.

"I didn't plan to," Tony said. "I came here looking for you, but when I saw her I caved." Tony rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm sorry. I didn't know what to do."

Loki's gaze stayed set on his father. He breathed in slowly, his face in profile to Tony. The bottom of his eye twitched in a glare that was dropped after a moment. "She had me evaluated here," Loki said. He tugged on his sweater sleeve, tense. "I'm going to have a few sessions of therapy, but I'm alright. I can go back to work." Tony slumped into his seat. "She explained the adoption. I was also furious that you told her that." Loki breathed in. "I still am, actually."

"I didn't mean to," Tony said. He wanted to start defending himself, but he was afraid he'd say something wrong and make it worse.

Loki set his thumbs together, brushing one back and forth across the other. "I'm sorry that you found me. If it's any consolation Tony, I truly did go up there to smoke."

Tony felt the panic from before creeping back in. "I don't believe you," he blurted.

"At first," Loki amended, turning away. It was the first time that Tony recognized shame in him. He should've seen it sooner, but he hadn't.

Tony bit his cheek. He thought back through the things that Rhodey had told him.

"I know you're angry at me," Loki said. "But I didn't do it to spite you. You have no idea how much it hurts to be lied to. To be told one thing your entire life, only to discover it's fiction." Loki's hands grasped his knees, his knuckles turning white for a split second. "And then to have you yelling at me for it—Tony, I'm—" Loki's voice broke suddenly, and all too late Tony was aware of the tears in his eyes. "I needed you."

Tony turned in his chair, unable to initiate contact, held back by guilt. He couldn't stand to witness the raw emotion in Loki. "I—I was terrified of losing you and that made me mad at you for doing it." Tony squeezed his eyes shut for a moment. "I guess I thought it meant I wasn't enough for you, and I love you so much— I just—" Tony scrubbed his hands against his face. "I freaked out. I'm

sorry.”

“I love you too.” The glassy sheen in Loki’s eyes wavered. “You idiot,” he muttered, voice choked by a restrained sob. “What happened didn’t have anything to do with you.” He spoke in angry frustration. “I didn’t plan it. I didn’t want you to have to find me up there. I love you more than anyone else.” He gasped in a breath. The weight of what Loki’d said hit Tony hard in the chest. “Except perhaps my family, but they have been on my shit list.” Loki glanced over at his father with a hint of worry.

Loki’s bottom lip started to tremble. “You have no idea how guilty I felt that night, Tony. You—” He turned to stare at Tony, eyes welling up again. Loki blinked quickly, looking away and biting his bottom lip. “You,” he tried again, voice cracking. “Were shaking. I felt awful, Tony. And then in the morning—” Loki pinched the bridge of his nose and then let go almost as quickly, gripping the arm rests. “This is such a fucking mess,” he whispered.

Loki quietly wiped the tears from his face, staring down at his knees. The self-hatred Tony had witnessed before in their relationship was back in droves.

“Loki,” Tony said. He blinked, fighting back his own tears. It was hell to see Loki cry.

“How can I make it better?” Tony asked.

Loki pressed his lips together. “You can’t,” he said. That hadn’t at all been what Tony had expected to hear. He didn’t like feeling powerless, like there was nothing he could do. “What’s happened isn’t because of you. But I’d—I’d like it if you came to some of the therapy sessions with me.”

“I can do that,” Tony said, immensely relieved to have something tangible he could do. He didn’t understand all of it. It was all still so raw and fresh, but knowing he could go with Loki and do something at least helped.

Loki smoothed a hand through his hair, grasping his bun at the back and pulling on a lock from it. “I didn’t *want* to hurt you, Tony.”

“I know.” He did. He got it now.

“What’s happened with my family—I don’t know that I’ll ever fully forgive them,” Loki admitted. “It’s going to take some time. And—” He started to wring his hands again.

When Tony didn’t think Loki was going to finish his thought he asked, “Are you still going to work for Asgard?”

“Yes,” Loki said with far more vehemency than Tony’d been expecting. “I’ve labored my entire life over advancing my position there, and I deserve to have it.”

Tony breathed in tightly through his nose, but knew better than to say anything. Loki would work there whether Tony liked it or not. It was just one of those things that they were going to disagree on.

“When my father wakes, we will have a discussion,” Loki said. He folded his arms over his chest, tapping his foot irritably. “My mother is—” Some of the anger dropped from Loki’s voice, replaced by the affection he had for his mother. “Determined to set our family right again. She admitted that they handled the adoption poorly.”

“Why didn’t they tell you?” Tony asked.

“They wanted to protect me from the truth to spare me the pain,” Loki said bitterly. “It seems Father had forgotten he’d even had the adoption papers in his files.”

“Oh.” Tony didn’t know what else to say, especially because most of what was rocketing through his brain wasn’t sympathetic towards Loki’s family.

Loki shifted restlessly in his seat, stretching his parted legs out further onto the floor before sitting upright again. “It’s not something that you can fix, Tony—”

“—I’m not trying to—”

“—You do though.” Loki clasped his hands together and held them to his face, breathing in before letting go and turning to him. “Tony, I love you, but you have a strong tendency to try and fix things. Everything’s not a device that can be fixed. Everything doesn’t have a solution. Please, just—try not to fix this, alright?”

Tony broke into an ugly scowl. “So you want me to just accept what’s happened like it’s no big deal—”

“—No,” Loki said, holding up his pointer finger. “That’s not what I’m saying. What’s happened has happened. I’m asking you not to take it on as yours alone to fix.” He held Tony’s gaze with steely determination while Tony struggled to understand. “This is messy, Tony. I’m—” Loki blinked, tears welling up again. “I don’t need anything from you but for you to be there. I can’t fight about this, Tony.” Loki stared into his eyes, imploring him. “Please. Try not to fix it.”

Tony flexed his fingers, frustrated. He didn’t fully understand what Loki was asking. He wasn’t even sure that he understood all of what Loki had told him. “I don’t know what that looks like,” he admitted.

Loki managed a small smile for him. “Come with me here if I ask, but don’t call me fifty times in a row if I miss one phone call. Don’t take it on as your job to make me better or fix the shit with my family. Just—be you. I would really like you right now.”

“Minus the trying to fix everything,” Tony said.

“I know it’s not in your nature, Tony. But—I need that from you on this.”

“Okay,” Tony said. He wasn’t sure that he was going to get it right, but he’d at least try. Though, Loki was an idiot if he thought Tony wasn’t going to try and make things better between them. Sitting this close to Loki, Tony missed him. And this hurt like hell, but he wasn’t going to give up on them over it.

Loki tried to smile for him, but it looked more like he was gagging. He turned away from Tony again.

Loki’s sleeve had slipped back. He traced his thumb over the bruise on his hand. Tony couldn’t look away, even as the guilt gnawed on him. The whole thing was a mess. Loki was right.

He didn’t think that Loki wasn’t upset with him still, and Tony realized he wasn’t completely over being upset at Loki either. But he was also grateful that Loki was there, and he also loved Loki. All of it was just mixed together.

“We are kind of a mess, aren’t we?” Tony said.

He wasn’t expecting the relief that Loki expressed. “Yes.” His hands stilled.

“Hey Loki? I, uh, I know I probably could’ve done some things differently, and—” He was probably always going to ruminate over what he could’ve done, but that didn’t change anything. “I want you to know I’m going to try and do better. I want to be there for you, and I love you. So, whatever you need. I’m here.”

“Thank you.” Affection graced Loki’s features, and Tony felt a swell in his chest. “I’m sorry. I wish things had gone differently.” He blinked, tears welling up again, and Tony understood there was more than Loki could manage to say.

“I don’t think there’s anything you really have to say sorry for, Lo.” Tony smiled comfortingly at Loki. Loki broke into a smile that was part grimace, the tears freed to roll down his cheeks. Tony found himself silently crying again too. They looked at each other, returning tired smiles through the tears.

Loki brushed his thumb under his eyes, recomposing himself as Tony did the same. Tony took a deep breath. It was painful, but he finally had the sense that it would be okay, even if he wasn’t sure what that looked like yet.

“Hey, Loki?” Tony asked, voice soft. Loki hummed back. Tony reached for his hand, careful to gently lock their fingers together. “I’m glad you’re still here.”

Loki squeezed back. “Me too.”

Their hands stayed clasped together as they settled into companionable silence, the heart monitor beeping beside them as ambient noise drifted in from the hall.

The excessively cautious way that Tony took his hand to hold soothed some of the trepidation that Loki felt at Tony’s touch. Loki knew it hadn’t been intentional. He’d known that the entire time, and yet when Tony had reached for him, he’d still felt afraid.

Tony’s hand was warm though, and Loki could feel his heart rate dropping as the comforting sensation eased the tension in his chest.

They’d been quiet for a while now. Loki glanced at the mark. He’d been furious at Tony for it, when he wasn’t feeling horrifically guilty. His hand ached. The spot was tender, and he had difficulty grasping and holding on to things. When the pain sparked he’d feel a new sense of scorn for Tony. That wasn’t the worst of it, though. Loki hated that it was on a place where everyone could see it. It just made him look as damaged and fragile as he felt.

The doctor that’d examined him had probably written something on his chart about it too, despite Loki’s insistence that it hadn’t been intentional. Tony’d probably be on some list somewhere if Loki had given them his name.

Still though, Loki had traced it the day before in one of his darker moments and realized how dearly Tony had wanted to hold on to him. How dearly someone wanted him when it felt like there was no one. Loki was tormented by the memory of the terror in Tony’s eyes that night. The way he shook in bed, clinging to Loki like he might disappear at any moment. Tony wasn’t okay, even now, and Loki blamed himself for it.

Tony was an unbearably soft human being, in some intangible way that Loki couldn’t fully

describe. Despite his shit father and an unhappy upbringing, Tony was gentle and wholesome, heroic even. Loki had always known that. Sometimes he felt Tony was so unbearably precious that it was difficult to understand why he'd show any interest in Loki at all, when Loki lacked the tender approach that Tony had in spades.

This was also the first time that Loki had truly been angry with Tony. He hadn't been angry about the fic, but this hurt. Being blamed hurt. He was still wounded by the things that Tony had said in their fight. It was maybe the first thing to truly blemish his image of Tony, aside from some petty annoyances. And even though Loki was furious with Tony for telling his mother, he'd needed that conversation with her. He'd been unbearably hurt by her, and he was still reeling from it.

She hadn't had to keep the adoption a secret. He still really didn't understand why they'd thought it'd be less painful not to tell him. It certainly made sense why he'd always felt that he'd grown up in Thor's shadow now, even though they weren't that far apart in age. Her apologies and reassurances had been a help, but they weren't enough. Something fundamental had shifted in their relationship. Loki wasn't sure he could see her the same way again. He still loved her though, and she'd done everything in her power to care for him yesterday.

He glanced over at Tony. His boyfriend was watching his father, deep in thought. He looked better than the morning they'd fought. That was a relief. His mother had said Tony'd looked awful at the hospital. She was still worried about Tony.

Loki scratched at his jeans with his free hand. They were old and didn't fit quite right, but at least they'd found something of his at his parents' house for him to dress in today. He was wearing one of Thor's old sweaters. He'd been reluctant, but in the morning he'd been grateful that he'd stayed there the night before. It'd given him another chance in the morning for him to talk to his mother as she made him breakfast like he'd had growing up. If he was really honest, it was better than being alone in his own apartment with nothing but his thoughts. So much had happened the day before that it'd felt more like a year.

Tony shifted, his chair squeaking, drawing Loki out of his own head. Tony rubbed at his face, tired. Loki's expression softened as he watched Tony from the corner of his eye. He trusted Tony. He trusted Tony a hundred percent, and if Tony said he was there for him and going to try to do better, Loki knew he would.

Loki had needed him. He still needed him. Loki squeezed Tony's hand, pressing his lips together as he looked away. He heard Tony's chair squeak as he turned to look at Loki, but neither of them said anything. Loki wasn't sure how long they'd been sitting there. It'd definitely been a long while.

Now that Loki had reminded himself, he didn't want to spend the tonight alone in his apartment either. He did want to be back in it, though. And he'd forgiven Tony enough that he was open to inviting Tony over. Loki cleared his throat, ignoring how stuffy his nose still was from crying. "If I have a Star Trek marathon on my couch tonight, would you like to come?"

Tony's head whipped towards him. Loki glanced at him from the corner of his eye. Tony was staring at him like he was surprised. Tony swallowed. "If we can have pizza while we watch, yeah."

Loki hummed, tilting his head to the side slightly as he pulled a smile, the action still stiff and a bit awkward. "I was thinking about Chinese food."

Tony was quiet for a moment. "Both?"

“Okay,” Loki said. He breathed out, feeling a little lighter as they tried to find their footing together again. Tony hadn’t quite picked up on his teasing, or maybe it’d just fallen flat.

“Hey, uh, I kind of am hungry for lunch.” Tony glanced at Loki’s father with trepidation. “Maybe we can go down later?”

“We can go down now,” Loki said. “Nothing’s going to change simply because we are sitting here.” He started to rise from his chair, more willing to leave the weighty atmosphere of the room than Tony probably realized. Tony let go of his hand as they started towards the door, but he walked closer to Loki than he needed to. Loki appreciated it.

They passed Thor and his mother in the hallway, but when they explained they were going down to the cafeteria they weren’t stopped. Thor just warned them that the burgers sucked.

As they grabbed their trays and picked out food together, Loki found himself feeling slightly more hopeful. It was comforting to have Tony’s presence, and even though the whole thing was a shit storm he was only starting to process, it was a relief to have someone to weather it with him. He’d meant what he’d said to Tony. He loved Tony, and right now, he needed him. Just having him there was enough.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tony drummed his fingers along the steering wheel. The soda he'd picked up from the store was half full in his cupholder. It was a nice day out, and he had the windows rolled down as he waited in his usual parking space for Loki.

This was one of the days that he hadn't been invited in on the therapy session, but he was still there to pick Loki up. Not because Loki couldn't drive, or because he needed Tony to drive, but because it helped Tony to be able to do it for him, so Loki had been happy to allow it. Tony sat up as he spotted Loki coming down the sidewalk.

"Hey," Tony said, smiling brightly as Loki got in.

"Where'd you get this?" Loki asked, quizzical but amused as he reached for the ball of fur hanging from Tony's rearview mirror.

Tony smiled as he started the car. "Technically it's supposed to be a keychain, but I saw it by the register at the store and I thought it looked like a tribble, so I got it."

"I like it."

Tony smiled to himself, pulling out onto the freeway. "Are you hungry? I've got time to grab lunch before I've got to be back at work."

Loki's family had made an effort to give him more breaks and time off, and Tony was immensely grateful for it. Still, Loki wavered for a moment, probably out of habit before answering. "I'd like to try the place you pointed out on 8th."

"You're going to love it," Tony said.

Loki's lips pulled up into a smile as he stared down at his hands. The bruise had faded so that there was nothing but a wisp of yellow brown on his hand now. Tony was getting closer to forgiving himself for it. It was one of the things they'd talked about in the sessions Tony joined in on.

Things weren't perfect. They still struggled with what had happened, but things had gotten better. Odin had woken up. Loki was shown a new document that had been around for the past three years. It had him and Thor as co-presidents, but it was being scrapped for a new one. Thor was shaken. Understanding how badly Loki wanted the role of CEO had caused him to reevaluate his own interest in it. He'd decided that he wanted to take a secondary role so that he could pursue other things in his personal life. Loki had implied that his father had still been reluctant to the idea, but Frigga had given him the push to make the change. It seemed, at least for now, that their family really was trying to be better.

Thor had taken to making sure that his brother wasn't overworking himself too, which was really endearing the guy to Tony. They were actually becoming friends. Tony'd even gone out and met all of Thor's friends with Loki one night.

Of course Loki wasn't a fan of his brother's hovering, but somehow Tony thought Loki secretly appreciated it.

“Tony,” Loki said. “Are you free for a few hours this weekend? I was wondering if you’d be interested in sitting for me.”

“Sitting?”

“I’m going to try painting again,” Loki said. His tone strived for confidence, but Tony caught the way he was kneading his fingers together.

“You want to paint me?” Tony asked. “Paint me like one of your French girls,” Tony quoted, unable to stop himself, giddy. Loki rolled his eyes, smirking. “Do you want me to wear the corset and robe for it? Because I totally will.”

“I hadn’t planned on it,” Loki said softly.

“Oh,” Tony exclaimed, excited. “Do you want me to be nude?”

Loki didn’t seem sure whether he wanted to smile or not. He licked his lips, looking out the window. “Tony,” he said with some exasperation. “I didn’t mean it had to be sexual.” He wasn’t upset with Tony, though. He just seemed amused with Tony’s usual antics.

“I’m just saying, if you need a figure drawing model, you can count me in.” He glanced over to find that Loki was smiling to himself.

“I’ll remember,” Loki said.

Tony’s voice returned to his usual tone. “I think that’s great, Lo. I always wanted to see your paintings.”

“Didn’t you see the one in my mother’s study?”

Tony had to think for a second. “I kinda wasn’t paying attention for it when I visited your parents’ house. How’s your mom doing, by the way?”

“Fine,” Loki said. “She wants you to come out for tea again.” Tony scratched the back of his head, careful as he changed lanes. “She likes you.”

“I know,” Tony said. He still felt horrifically awkward around her.

“Don’t worry,” Loki assured him. “You won’t be required to attend family dinners.” Tony smiled in mock relief as Loki let his head drop back against the headrest.

Tony went around a minivan, enjoying the way the warm wind was blowing in through the sunroof. He was looking forward to seeing Loki paint. He was excited for Loki that he was picking it back up again.

One thing Tony had learned in the past couple weeks was that sometimes they really had to work hard to make the relationship work, and that wasn’t a bad thing. They understood each other better than they had at the beginning. Tony felt a lot closer to Loki also, now that they’d seen more of each other’s broken sides. They were still working on forgiving each other and themselves. He knew too that he wouldn’t be able to avoid his own family and his dad’s alcoholism forever. Someday Loki was going to have ride that wave with him, but Tony was pretty confident that even though it’d be hard, they could do it.

“I’ve been writing,” Loki said. “It’s not about us, but you can read it if you’d like.”

“What’s it about?”

Loki shifted uncertainly in his seat. Tony was probably one of the few people alive that got to see him act so unsure and bashful. “Spock and Jim. Although I’d like to write something with Scotty too.”

“Nice.” Tony held up his hand for Loki to high five. He laughed when Loki did, catching Tony's hand and holding it for a moment before letting go. “We’re definitely going to a convention in costume this year.”

“I’d like that,” Loki said. Then, with his usual sly humor he asked, “You’re going as a tribble, right?”

“No.”

“I thought that was a dating for six months thing,” Loki said.

Tony gave him an incredulous look. “Are you ever going to let that go?”

“Nope.” Loki smiled smugly. “We could probably find you a slutty tribble costume somewhere. Do you think it’ll have tribble nipple pasties?” Tony could not believe the gall of the guy. “And look, you have one right here,” he said, reaching for the one hanging from the rearview mirror. Tony let out a loud, dramatic sigh.

“You’re gross,” he declared. “You went and made tribbles gross.”

Loki burst into laughter, not at all remorseful.

“Let’s enter a costume contest,” Tony said. “I bet we’ll win.”

“How could we not?” Loki smirked, making eye contact for a moment with Tony. He loved when his boyfriend looked so smug.

“Maybe we could do a photo shoot of you in your costume too,” Loki said. “It is in character for Kirk to get his shirt torn open.”

“As long as it’s not a slutty tribble costume, I’m into it,” Tony said. “Maybe you could paint it on a huge canvas and have it hanging in your living room.”

“Tony, please.” Loki folded his arms over his chest, fighting off a smile. “I don’t wish to explain why I have a painting of you in a Star Trek costume with strategically cut holes in my living room.”

“You’re the one that said they’re strategically cut,” Tony said. Loki started to blush, then scoffed. “I’m just saying.”

“We’ll keep those to the flash drive, thank you,” he said. For a moment their conversation faded. Loki reached over, setting his hand on Tony’s thigh. “I’m looking forward to going to a convention together.”

“Me too, babe.” Loki’s thumb rubbed a small circle against Tony’s thigh in a sense of familiarity and trust. “Me too.”

Love was a choice and a lot of work, but it was the best choice he’d ever made with Loki. And any time Tony needed a reminder of how smitten they’d been and could be, he could go back and reread Loki’s fics. But as wonderful as those were, they didn’t even begin to compare to how

wonderful it was to be able to find Loki there in the flesh, with him.

Chapter End Notes

Of course recovery is a long road, but the story ends here, hopeful for their future. Thanks for reading, I'd love to hear your reactions and thoughts! That's it on this angsty off shoot, back to the much happier original. :D

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!